

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of using an interactive voice response (IVR) system and a computer server connected to a communications network to support voice messaging between individuals accessible through telephone devices located on the network and individuals accessible through computer devices located on the network, the method comprising:

receiving a plurality of voice messages from remote users of devices located on the network, each received voice message including information identifying at least one intended recipient;

for each received voice message, accessing a user profile for its intended recipient, said user profile specifying one or more communication devices located on the network by which such intended recipient should receive delivery or notification of voice messages directed to such intended recipient, said communication devices including at least one of a telephone device and a computer device;

notifying the intended recipients of the received voice messages according to their respective user profiles; and

delivering the received voice messages to their intended recipients in audio form, including delivering at least one of the received voice messages to its intended recipient in audio form using the IVR system and a telephone device specified in the user profile of the intended recipient, and delivering at least one other of the received voice messages to its intended recipient in audio form using the computer server and a computer device specified in the user profile of the intended recipient.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein delivering includes audio streaming the received voice messages to their intended recipients using the IVR system and the computer server.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein delivering includes delivering one of the received voice messages to its intended recipient through the communication device specified by such intended recipient in response to the notifying.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein notifying includes sending electronic messages to a plurality of the intended recipients, the electronic messages including hyperlinks to corresponding ones of the stored voice messages, whereby the plurality of intended recipients can initiate the delivering of associated voice messages by selecting the hyperlinks.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein said electronic messages include pop-up text messages.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving includes receiving prerecorded voice messages from the remote users.

7. The method of claim 1 further comprising storing the received voice messages.

8. The method of claim 1 further comprising restricting a length of each voice message to less than one minute.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein at least one of the voice messages is received together with information for addressing the communication device associated with its intended recipient, the method further comprising delivering said one of the voice messages to its intended

recipient using the information for addressing said communication device.

10. The method of claim 1 further comprising providing delivery confirmation to senders of the delivered voice messages.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein the communications network comprises a telecommunications network to which the IVR system is connected and a widely distributed computer network to which the computer server is connected, said IVR system and said computer server being connected to each other, and wherein the telephone devices are located on the telecommunications network and the computer devices are located on the widely distributed computer network.

12. The method of claim 11 further comprising receiving information via the computer server from a remote user of a computer device located on the widely distributed computer network, the received information indicating said remote user's desire to record a voice message using a telephone device located on the telecommunications network, and contacting such telephone device via the IVR system to capture such voice message.

13. The method of claim 11 further comprising supporting an instant text messaging option by which individuals having a presence on the widely distributed computer network at the same time can send pop-up text messages to one another through the widely distributed computer network.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein notifying includes determining whether an intended recipient of one of the received voice messages has a presence on the widely distributed computer network at a particular time and, if

so, contemporaneously sending a pop-up text message to such intended recipient, the pop-up text message notifying such intended recipient of said one of the received voice messages.

15. The method of claim 13 wherein receiving voice messages via the IVR system includes receiving a telephone call via the IVR system from a user having a predefined group of contacts, determining whether said contacts currently have a presence on the widely distributed computer network, and advising the user via the IVR system regarding which of said contacts currently have a presence on the widely distributed computer network.

16. The method of claim 1 further comprising automatically generating a voice message upon an occurrence of a predefined event, and delivering the automatically generated voice message to one or more of the remote users.

17. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 1.

18. An apparatus for recording and sending audio messages to one or more remote devices, the apparatus comprising a processor, a memory device, computer instructions stored in the memory device, a microphone, and an interface to a communications network, the computer instructions configuring the processor to record in an audio file, in response to input from a user, an audio message provided by the user to the microphone, and to transfer the audio file in which the audio message is recorded to the communications network via said interface, whereby the audio message recorded in the audio file may be

transmitted through the communications network for delivery to said one or more remote devices.

19. The apparatus of claim 18 wherein the computer instructions configure the processor to compress the audio file prior to transferring the audio file to the communications network via said interface.

20. The apparatus of claim 18 wherein the computer instructions configure the processor to limit a length of the audio message provided by the user to less than one minute.

21. The apparatus of claim 18 wherein the input from the user includes information identifying one or more individuals to whom the audio message should be sent, and wherein the computer instructions configure the processor to record said information in the audio file.

22. The apparatus of claim 21 wherein the computer instructions configure the processor to record information identifying said user in the audio file.

23. The apparatus of claim 18 wherein the apparatus is a telephony device, and wherein the communications network includes a telephony network.

24. The apparatus of claim 23 wherein the telephony device is a mobile telephony device, and wherein the telephony network is a wireless telephony network.

25. The apparatus of claim 18 wherein the apparatus is a computer device, and wherein the communications network includes a computer network.

26. The apparatus of claim 25 wherein the computer network is the Internet.

27. The apparatus of claim 25 wherein the computer device is a handheld computer device.

28. A method for recording and sending an audio message to one or more remote devices using a computer device having a microphone and a network interface, the method comprising:

receiving the audio message from a user through the microphone;

recording the received audio message in an audio file; and

sending the audio file to the network interface for delivery to said one or more remote devices through a communications network.

29. The method of claim 28 wherein recording includes recording the audio message in the audio file as the audio message is received.

30. The method of claim 28 wherein the audio message is a message spoken by the user.

31. The method of claim 28 further comprising compressing the audio file prior to sending.

32. The method of claim 28 further comprising receiving information from the user identifying one or more individuals to whom the audio message should be sent, and wherein recording includes recording said information in the audio file.

33. The method of claim 32 further comprising providing the user with a list of individuals to whom the audio message may be sent, and wherein receiving information includes receiving one or more selections by the user from said list.

34. The method of claim 33 further comprising supporting instant text messaging between said user and the individuals of said list.

35. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 34.

36. The method of claim 32 wherein receiving information includes receiving information for addressing one or more devices associated with said one or more individuals.

37. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 28.

38. A method of supporting messaging between individuals over a widely distributed computer network, the method comprising:

providing an instant messaging system by which individuals having a presence on the widely distributed computer network at the same time can send pop-up text messages to one another; and

providing a voice messaging option within said instant messaging system by which individuals can record and send voice messages to one another through the widely distributed computer network.

39. The method of claim 38 wherein the voice messaging option includes an option by which a remote user of a computer device located on the widely distributed computer network can record a voice message using a microphone associated with the computer device.

40. The method of claim 38 wherein the voice messaging option includes an option by which a remote user of a computer device located on the widely distributed computer network can initiate, via the computer device, the

recording and sending of a voice message using a telephone device located on a telecommunications network.

41. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 38.

42. A method comprising:

receiving a voice message on behalf of an intended recipient from a remote device over a communications network;

storing the received voice message;

determining whether the intended recipient has a presence on a widely distributed computer network; and

if the intended recipient has a presence on the widely distributed computer network, sending an electronic message to the intended recipient via the widely distributed computer network, the electronic message notifying the intended recipient of the received voice message.

43. The method of claim 42 further comprising, if the intended recipient does not have a presence on the widely distributed computer network, accessing a user profile for the intended recipient, and sending the received voice message to the intended recipient in accordance with said user profile.

44. The method of claim 42 wherein the electronic message is an instant text message.

45. The method of claim 42 wherein the electronic message includes a hyperlink to the stored voice message.

46. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 42.

47. A method comprising:

receiving a voice message on behalf of an intended recipient;

storing the received voice message; and

sending an electronic message to the intended recipient, the electronic message including a hyperlink to the stored voice message, whereby the intended recipient can retrieve the stored voice message by selecting the hyperlink.

48. The method of claim 47 further comprising automatically generating the voice message upon occurrence of a predefined event.

49. The method of claim 47 further comprising receiving information from the intended recipient specifying a device through which the intended recipient desires to receive the voice message, contacting the device specified by the user, and delivering the voice message to the intended recipient through the specified device.

50. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 47.

51. A method comprising:

receiving a telephone call from a user having a predefined group of contacts;

determining whether said contacts currently have a presence on a widely distributed computer network; and

advising the user through said telephone call regarding which of said contacts were determined to currently have a presence on the widely distributed computer network.

52. The method of claim 51 wherein the receiving and the advising are performed by an interactive voice response system.

53. The method of claim 51 further comprising receiving a voice message from the user through said telephone call, and sending the received voice message to one or more of said contacts.

54. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 51.

55. A method comprising:
receiving information from a first device associated with a user indicating the user's desire to record and send an audio message;

contacting the user via a second device associated with the user; and

receiving the audio message from the user via the second device.

56. The method of claim 55 wherein the first device is of a first device type and the second device is of a second device type different than the first device type.

57. The method of claim 56 wherein the first device type is a computer device, and wherein the second device type is a telephone device.

58. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 55.